

real not real

by memorysdaughter

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Summary: Their anniversary dinner is the first time Patterson sees David after his death. It's not the last time.

real not real

****A/N:**** A Tumblr friend challenged me to write, and I quote, "Patterson angst." Request fulfilled. Like, a lot.

Content warning for self-harm, alcohol abuse, attempted suicide, and psychosis.

I also post on AO3 as earthquakegirl and on Tumblr as memorysdaughter.

Thanks to everyone who reads/reviews/favorites/etc. You're all amazing.

Enjoy!

* * *

><p>The first time it happens she doesn't think much of it. It's their anniversary, she's at their favorite restaurant with his crossword puzzle on the table before her. Where else would he be?

(She forgets he's dead.)

(Maybe it's not so much forgetting as choosing not to remember.)

Real.

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><p>The second time it happens she's just collided with Agent Seles â€" a former bodybuilder â€" in the hallway and fallen, sprawled on her back with paperwork strewn about her like an out-of-season blizzard. Her head cracks against the tile floor and when Agent Seles leans down to help her up she swears she sees David's worried face, swears she sees David standing there as though he's going to embrace her, make a terrible joke about "kissing it better" and hug her.<p>

Her vision gets blurry and she feels woozy.

(She remembers he's dead.)

(Maybe she has a concussion.)

Not real.

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><p>When she's alone at home the lines get blurrier. She thinks she hears his voice in the kitchen, but when she goes out there, expecting to find him chopping fruit in that haphazard way he always did, preparing some sort of midnight fruit salad, it's dark and empty. He's not on the couch criticizing the science on CSI or playing _Tales from The Borderlands_ or rolling new Dungeons and Dragons characters for them both. He's not under the sink in the bathroom trying to figure out how to tell her they need to hire a real plumber, since he's just broken it further.

(But it feels like he _could_ be.)

(Like he _should_ be.)

Real/not real.

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><p>She's not sure when she starts talking to him again. Maybe it's after the whole mess with Fischer. Maybe it's when she finds his watch behind a bottle of mouthwash in the medicine cabinet. Maybe it's the night she's crying on the floor in the kitchen, unable to breathe, choking on her own regrets, terrified to call anyone to ask for help lest they think she's insane or stupid or both.<p>

Then it becomes habit. _Come home. Have a drink. Or four. Talk to David._

(He's a good listener.)

(She forgets everything else â€" the real world and the real people who anchor her to it.)

Real.

* * *

><p>You're not looking in the right places, he says.

"I'm doing the best I can with what you gave me! Honestly, 'flower' and 'script' â€" it could be any one of her tattoos! And she's got

hundreds," she informs him tartly.

My apologies. I forgot to take 'decoding cryptic tattoos' as a skill, he snarks at her.

"Put it on your night school class list," she suggests.

(He grins.)

(She feels whole.)

Not real.

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><p>She blacks out for the first time on her birthday, wakes with blood in her mouth and on her hands.<p>

She knows it's bad. Knows she should be worried that she's bitten her own tongue.

Can't be bothered to do a damn thing about it.

Can't be bothered to do a damn thing about it the next two times it happens.

(Wakes to a shattered mirror and lacerated hands the first time.)

(Wakes in a hospital the second time with a concussion and two deep, jagged cuts on her wrists held together with far too many stitches.)

Real. Way too real.

* * *

><p>They tell her someone needs to come and talk to the doctor, so she has them call Jane.<p>

Looks over at David. "They think I'm crazy."

Can you blame them? You're talking to someone who isn't here.

"You're here."

Not like you are.

"Well, you've always been different. It's one of the things I like about you."

You know this has to stop.

At that she stops short. It's like he punched her in the stomach.

"No," she whispers in horror. "No. No, I won't let you go."

Maybe that's the problem.

"Don't _talk_ to me like that!" she screams, clutching her head.

"Please, please, promise meâ€¦!"

At some point maybeâ€¦!

"NO! You're here, you're going to help me figure all of this out. You have the clues, you know where the answers are. You haven't shown all of them to me yet, so you _can't_ leave!"

I can only show you the answers if you're not in here.

"What?"

(It's then she looks up and realizes Jane and Mayfair are at the door.)

(Realizes the door's locked â€" not to keep them from getting in but to keep her from getting out.)

Not real.

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><p>Borden comes in the morning and finds her under the bed. He doesn't say anything about her position. He sits down on the floor across from the bed. Sets a brownie on a napkin and pushes it towards her.<p>

Don't eat it, David says. _It's probably got something in it. Something to keep you calm. Or sedated._

She finds her voice. "What's in it?"

"It's got sprinkles," Borden says mildly. "I bought it at the deli this morning when I got my coffee."

"What's _in_ it?" she repeats, louder.

"It's just a brownie."

Lies.

She looks at it.

Borden sees her freeze and he takes a still-wrapped brownie, factory-sealed, out of his blazer pocket. He pushes this one towards her.

You can eat that one, David says. _They couldn't have put anything in there._

"Can you tell me what happened two nights ago?" Borden asks.

Without her permission her hand snakes out and grabs the brownie. It smells good. She's starving.

(She doesn't remember what happened two nights ago.)

(And she knows that's not what he wants to hear.)

Real.

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><p>He tells her what happened two nights ago. Tells her about Weller calling 911 after he found her unconscious on her kitchen floor, bleeding, knife still in her hand.<p>

It was just a little knife, David reminds her. _A pocket knife. I think they might have overreacted._

Tells her about all of the empty liquor bottles they found at her apartment.

You're an adult.

Tells her that it's very likely that if Weller hadn't shown up to bring her some files, she would most likely be dead.

"Don't have anything to say about that, do you?" she mutters to David, mouth full of brownie.

"Who are you talking to?" Borden asks gently.

She points. "He's right there."

(He doesn't turn his head.)

(But his eyes fill with sadness.)

Not real.

* * *

><p>She loses track of time. Of the pills they give her. Of whether it's day or night. Of when she last ate. Of everything except David. He holds her hand and tells her it's going to be okay, but nothing feels okay.

She's underwater, drowning, flailing for air, breaking the surface to grab onto some_thing_ or some_one_ but unable to get a firm grasp to save herself.

They're all there, moving blurrily around her. Reade brings her a coloring book and crayons. Mayfair holds her hand " the one David isn't holding " and talks to her. Zapata lets her win at checkers every single time. Weller reads to her from whatever's handy " _ESPN Magazine_, a _Game of Thrones_ book, an _Avengers_ comic book " until the plotlines blur in her head: _Kobe Bryant defeated King Joffrey with the help of Captain America and Scarlet Witch_. She knows none of it's real but she can't figure out which parts aren't.

(It's weird how proud she is of Kobe Bryant.)

(But then again, everyone knows Joffrey's a little bitch.)

Real.

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><p>Jane doesn't force her to stop talking to David. She seems to understand that David has a lot of things to say.<p>

Jane never says "hallucination." Or "psychosis." Or "we're all very worried about you" or "why would you want to kill yourself?"

Jane listens.

Until one day Jane says, "Would you like to go home?"

(She can't remember where home is.)

(She can't remember why she doesn't want to go there, but she knows she doesn't.)

Real/not real.

* * *

><p>They can't just let her go home, though.

It's a process.

It takes a village.

She goes to a meeting with a lot of doctors and all of the members of her weird little family, who all tell those doctors certain things.

Borden says things like "post-traumatic psychosis." And "low probability of repeat attempts of self-harm." And "demonstrated effectiveness of treatment in familiar outpatient settings."

Mayfair says "twenty-four hour supervision." And "rotating schedule of caregivers." And "leave of absence."

Weller says "We're all going to take care of her."

Jane says "She'll never be alone again."

No, of course not, David says. _She has me._

But when she turns to look at him, for the first time since he showed up again, he looksâ€| blurry. Insubstantial.

It scares her.

(She throws up.)

(It makes her wrists burn.)

Not real.

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><p>She goes home, but she doesn't.<p>

She goes to Jane's house, the safe house.

It's ironic, except that it isn't.

Her coworkers are no longer her coworkers. They are her caretakers.

They force her to eat. To take her pills. To brush her hair and her teeth. To sleep.

They want her to talk to them.

They don't want her to talk to David.

They want her to do simple things: jigsaw puzzles, Legos, coloring.

They don't want her to do complex things: math, work on the tattoos, crossword puzzles.

There are no "sharps" â€" no knives, no pens, no razors, no small appliances she could theoretically take apart and turn into weapons.

(She cries a lot.)

(They think it's their fault.)

Real.

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><p>David wants her to run away.<p>

"I can't go anywhere," she says to him.

You're the smartest person in this house, he tells her. _You could figure out a way if you really wanted to._

"I _do_ really want to!"

Then figure it out, genius.

"No. I can't do that to them," she whispers, pressing her hands against her eyes. "They've given up almost everything so I didn't have to stay in the hospital, and to betray themâ€|"

Who's betraying who? he demands.

"I don't know anymore," she chokes out. "I don't know."

You don't want to be with me anymore.

"NO!" she screams at him. "That's not true! It's _not_ true!"

Prove it to me. Prove to me that you can get out of here.

"No." She buries her head in her hands and sobs. "No."

Maybe I'll just leave.

"Maybe it would be easier if you did!" she spits at him.

(The floor seems to fall away.)

(She gets nauseous.)

Not real.

* * *

><p>He leaves.<p>

Not all once.

Piece by piece.

Every single piece hurts.

The first time she realizes she hasn't seen him all day she gets violent. Screams. Beats her hands against her head. Demands he come back right now. Scratches at her skin. Tries to fight off Jane, who comes to try and stop her.

Comes back into her body to find she's on the floor in the kitchen, Jane pinning her arms to her body and her legs to the floor.

She's all out of tears.

(At least, that's what she thinks.)

(Until it happens again.)

Real.

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><p>During one of her "episodes" â€" she knows that's what they're all calling them â€" Borden comes to her. Weller's got her restrained, she's fighting him and screaming and yelling for David, but it's Borden who comes instead.<p>

"He's telling you it's time to let him go," Borden says softly.

"He wouldn't say that!"

But he's not there. He doesn't say anything.

"This is how your brain shows you it's ready to let go of some harmful things," Borden goes on.

"He's not _harmful!_" she screams at him.

Borden grabs her wild hands, holds them up, forces her to look at the rows of stitches on her wrists. "He wanted you to do this," he says. "Would the David you knew, the David you loved, _ever_ tell you to hurt yourself like this?"

She sags back against Weller, the fight suddenly gone out of her. "No," she whispers in horror. "No."

(She throws up again.)

(It makes her wrists burn. And her chest aches.)

Real/not real.

* * *

><p>The last time she sees him it's in a dream. He's been gone from the "real world" for two weeks.<p>

In the dream he's smiling, and he takes her hand. "You're going to be safe now."

"You don't know that."

"I'm going to make _sure_ of it."

And she smiles, and holds him tight, and tries not to let go.

"But you have to fight it, too," he says softly. "The not-me in your headâ€| you have to fight him."

"How?" she whispers.

"Tell him the truth," he says simply, and then he's gone.

(She wakes up in tears.)

(It confuses the hell out of Reade.)

Not real.

* * *

><p>He's been gone for two months when she suddenly hears his voice, suddenly sees him in the corner of the living room. You thought you were getting better, didn't you?

She freezes. She's finally gotten back some of the things she lost, like pens. And crossword puzzles. And for twenty minutes a day they let her work on a tattoo.

She can't lose those things.

She hears her David, _real_ David â€" "Tell him the truth."

"You're a hallucination," she says, mouth numb. "You're caused by an imbalance of chemicals in my brain. You're not real."

I love you.

"You can't love me. You're not real."

You love me.

"No. I loved David Wagner, but he's dead. And you're not him," she says. "He wasâ€| he was amazing. And wonderful. And he was _real_. And you're never going to be any of those things."

(And she puts her head down, eyes on her crossword, waiting for her heart to stop pounding in her ears.)

(She doesn't know when he leaves, but the next time she looks up, she's alone again.)

Real.

* * *

><p>On David's birthday she tells Jane she wants to bake a cake, so they do. Jane does all the measuring and lets her pour in all of the ingredients. They mix it by hand, taking turns with the wooden spoon, but Jane does everything with the oven.<p>

They don't talk about anything in particular while it's baking. It's raining and the house fills up with the smell of cake and for the first time in a long time she feels something like contentment.

Mayfair comes by to relieve Jane and finds them eating cake with their fingers, frosting all over their faces. Mayfair has a small packet, addressed to her in care of the FBI office.

The packet contains a note and a small velvet bag.

The note reads: _I know I had this delivered on my birthday, but I saw this a few months ago and thought one gift-giving occasion is just as good as any other, right? I love you._

His handwriting nearly causes her heart to stop.

(The bag contains a bracelet â€" silver, with a small engraved plaque:)

(_Not all those who wander are lost.)_

Real.

End
file.